

Working Paper

Research Unit EU External Relations
Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik
German Institute for International
and Security Studies

Stephanie Hofmann/ Ronja Kempin

France and the Transatlantic Relationship

Love me, love me not....

Ludwigkirchplatz 3-4
10719 Berlin
Telefon +49 30 880 07-0
Fax +49 30 880 07-100
www.swp-berlin.org
swp@swp-berlin.org

Working papers are papers in the subject area of a Research Unit, which are not officially published by SWP. These papers are either preliminary studies that later become papers published by SWP or papers that are published elsewhere. Your comments are always welcome.

**Working paper FG 2, 2007/ 04, February 2007
SWP Berlin**

France and the Transatlantic Relationship. Love me, love me not ...

Stephanie Hofmann / Ronja Kempin

This article will soon be published in : Peter Schmidt (ed.). 2007. *Beyond NATO – The Transatlantic Security Relationship Approaching 2010*. Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft.

“Messieurs, vous n’avez pas de majorité”.¹ Addressing the Security Council in March 2003, the French foreign minister, Dominique de Villepin, confronted the American delegation with its failure to gain the necessary support for a UN-backed military intervention in Iraq. M. de Villepin’s speech received lengthy applause – something that had not been seen in the Council before-, and Colin Powell was obliged to admit before a global audience that the UN had refused its support.

French interests and perceptions in the realm of security are important and must be taken into consideration when contemplating the future of the security relationship between the US, NATO and Europe. After all, France - with its 60.7 million citizens, a GDP of \$2 trillion and a defence budget in 2006 of €47 billion² - is one of the major players in the European and, arguably, global security environment.

Was the incident described above telling as regards transatlantic relations from a French point of view? Certainly the one-upmanship apparent in M. de Villepin’s speech is indicative of an underlying strand of Franco-US relations. France and the US are both representatives of certain universalist philosophies: they both act according to an almost missionary agenda, seeking to spread their respective values abroad. This puts the two countries in competition with one other, irrespective of the power constellations and constraints they are acting within.³

Against the background of the recent wrangling over Iraq, this chapter seeks to answer the question: what is France’s perception of the transatlantic relationship, and what goals does France pursue in it? Or, asked from a US point of view: why is France not an “easy” partner? To answer this question, we focus on security and defense policy aspects during and after the Cold War.

We argue that a constant in France’s policies and politics *vis à vis* the transatlantic security relationship is its desire to create a multipolar world. A multipolar world is a system characterized by the fact that several actors that have similar capabilities at their disposal. For France, fostering multipolarity requires the creation of a countervailing force to the US *but* this does not mean that France wants to contradict the US at every turn. Through multipolarity, as opposed to the – from its point of view – very constraining unipolar world,⁴ France seeks to give itself a greater margin of latitude to act independently of its partner

¹ “Sirs, you do not have a majority.”

² http://www.defense.gouv.fr/sites/defense/decouverte/chiffres_cles/budget/projet_de_loi_de_finances_2006_-_budget_de_la_defense871.

³ Cogan, Charles. 1994. “Oldest Allies, Guarded friends. The United States and France since 1940.”

Westprot/Conn., Haglund, David G. 2000. “*Feuding Hillbillies*” of the West? *A Modest Inquiry into the Significance and Sources of Franco-American Conflict in International Security*, in: Haglund, David G. (Ed.) *The France-US Leadership Race: Closely Watched Allies*, Queen’s Quaterly, Kingston., pp. 19-43, Mathy, Jean-Philippe. 2000. *French Resistance: The French-American Culture Wars*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. Kuisel, Richard. 2004. “What Do the French Think of Us? The Deteriorating Image of the United States, 2000-2004” *French Politics, Culture and Society* 22 (Fall).

⁴ Wohlforth, William C. 1999. “The Stability of a Unipolar World.” *International Security* 24: 5-41.

across the Atlantic as well as to decrease the interdependence between them.⁵ This policy is based on the rationale that it will give France the greatest room of manoeuvre to spread those universal values it stands for: liberty, equality, fraternity.

Due to different global power distributions over time, France has had to adjust its strategies to pursue this goal of a multipolar world: The bipolar structure of the international system during the Cold War allowed France to act with relative freedom and according to its own values and principles. Thus France pushed for a multipolar world via strategies that ran the gamut from the unilateral (e.g. *force de frappe*) to those undertaken with partners but on an *à la carte* basis. With the end of the Cold War, the tables were turned. France cannot free-ride on the US's security provision anymore, and hence its range of action is now more constrained. However, the new structural constraints do not influence France's missionary zeal *per se*. That is, while the systemic changes do not affect France's *preference over outcome* – namely the creation of a multipolar world – it nonetheless has an impact on France's *preference over the strategy* employed to achieve this outcome. France's attitude towards NATO has altered, because the Organisation has gained a different strategic significance for the realisation of these outcomes. Unilateral action is becoming increasingly difficult for the French. Instead, in trying to foster its preference over outcome, France has to compromise and, in practice, it needs to act with the US in multilateral security institutions such as NATO even more today than during the Cold War.

France's strategic room for manoeuvre during the Cold War

Prominent scholars of the bipolar Cold War have argued that the foreign policies of medium-sized states such as France were aligned, as if in a magnetic field, around their respective "pole" – the USSR or US. In France's case, this would, of course, have been the US. According to these interpretations, the medium-sized states had no means to follow policies distinct from their superpower allies.⁶ France can, however, be called an exception to this observation as it did not formulate its national goals (preference over outcome) in accordance with the US but instead pursued its own strategies to achieve its goal: a multipolar world in which no superpowers could decide over its options in world politics.⁷

During the Cold War, France formulated – perhaps with greater consistency than any other member of NATO – a clear conceptual framework for its own security policy. This framework can be traced back to a specific understanding of international relations that in turn is firmly rooted in a certain kind of universalist philosophy; this is intimately linked to a French political culture emphasizing the pre-eminence of nation-states and their sovereign rights. French security doctrine was organized around the core principle of decision-making autonomy and the need for an independent defense capacity.⁸

Military independence was seen as a necessary condition for political influence. If France wanted to play a role on the world stage, Charles de Gaulle (French President from 1959 to 1969) who set the tone for future French foreign, security and defense policy, concluded, it would have to be as independent as possible from the need for outside (American) protection. The international system that France was acting in, in conjuncture with France's insistence on the pre-eminence of the nation-state, meant that it pushed for the creation of a multipolar world – France's preferred outcome as regards the world order and its position in it. In the

⁵ Chirac, Jacques. 2000. „Speech on European security and defence by Mr Jacques Chirac, President of the French Republic, to the Presidential Committee of the WEU Assembly at the Elysée Palace, Paris, 30 May 2000.“ http://www.assembly-weu.org/en/documents/sessions_ordinaires/rpt/2000/1699.html [November 30, 2005].

⁶ Waltz, Kenneth N. 1979. *Theory of International Politics*. Reading: Addison-Wesley.

⁷ Schmidt, Peter. 1997. *Frankreichs Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik zwischen Integration und Unilateralismus*, in: Kurt R. Spillmann (Ed.), *Zürcher Beiträge zur Sicherheitspolitik und Konfliktforschung*, Heft Nr.44, pp. 18-33.

⁸ Sauder, Axel. 1999. *France's Security Policy since the End of the Cold War*, in: Carl Cavanagh Hodge (ed.), *Redefining European Security*, New York und London: Garland Publishing, pp. 117-143.

years between 1958 and 1966, de Gaulle gradually translated this conception into a coherent policy.⁹ Hence, his *force de frappe* and his decision to leave NATO's integrated command structure gradually increased France's range of actions *vis à vis* its main allies and NATO. France's attempts at the beginning of the 1960s to create a European Political Union with its own defence policy can be seen as another attempt to create a multipolar world with the help of a multilateral, intergovernmental institution. However, the Fouchet Plans which suggested such a Union were never realized.¹⁰

Of course, these principles, doctrines and universalisms did not make military cooperation with other states impossible but rather limited the scope for such cooperation. De Gaulle argued that allied assistance could not be taken for granted. France considered its relationship with the US and NATO as "ami, allié, pas aligné."¹¹ Furthermore, military integration was considered politically illegitimate, because in the eyes of French policy-makers it tended to dilute the member-states' fundamental responsibility for the defence of their citizens. However, one has to point out that while France's rhetoric was very much centered on a discourse of *grandeur* and *indépendance*, its actions showed that *l'état nation* would function as a reliable ally if its partners required help. For example, although withdrawing from NATO's military arm, de Gaulle made sure that certain rules helped coordinate the NATO-France relationship: the Lemnitzer-Ailleret and the Ferber-Valentin agreements.

This is not to say that French security doctrine was equally adapted to the specific context of the Cold War. It responded to a Soviet threat by a qualified commitment to NATO, while maximizing political influence and status through its claim to pursue an "independent" security policy. The benefits France could draw from its autonomous doctrine were dependent on bipolarity. De Gaulle was convinced that France, while benefiting evidently from military cooperation with its allies would be in a better position politically and militarily if in extreme cases it could do without external assistance. He pursued a multipolar world and could choose from an array of unilateral and multilateral strategies to do so.

Strategic adaptations after the end of the Cold War

With the end of the Cold War and the restructuring of the international system, France has had to adapt to an altogether new political and strategic environment.¹² The main characteristics of this new environment are the following: there is only one superpower left (the USA), and there is no more massive threat, but rather an array of limited and more diverse risks to the European continent and its adjacent regions.¹³ This has had fundamental repercussions for armed forces, security strategies and, most importantly, international cooperation – especially for France. The extent to which France felt threatened by America's *hyperpuissance* in the second half of the 1990s is made clear by a statement of former Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine. In 1997, he stated in the French National Assembly: "Le monde nouveau est marqué par une prédominance des Etats-Unis que l'on qualifie parfois d'hégémonie [...] La différence par rapport à l'état de choses antérieur est qu'il n'y a plus de

⁹ Vaïsse, Maurice. 1996. Indépendance et solidarité, 1958-1963, in: Maurice Vaïsse, Pierre Mélandri, Frédéric Bozo (Eds.). *La France et l'OTAN 1949-1996*. Paris: Editions Complexe, p. 219-247; Frédéric Bozo. 1996. Chronique d'une décision annoncée: le retrait de l'organisation militaire (1965-1967), in: Maurice Vaïsse, Pierre Mélandri, Frédéric Bozo (Eds.). *La France et l'OTAN 1949-1996*. Paris: Editions Complexe, p. 331-359.

¹⁰ Bodenheimer, Suzanne J. 1967. *Political Union: A Microcosm of European Politics 1960-1966*. Leyden: A.W. Sijthoff.

¹¹ „Friend, ally, but not aligned.” (own translation) This is the heading of Chapter IV of Hubert Védrine. 1996. *Le monde de François Mitterrand*. Paris: Editions Fayard.

¹² Schmidt, Peter. 2002. *Frankreichs Schwierigkeiten mit den Vereinigten Staaten und der NATO – Entwicklungstrends eine mühsamen Partnerschaft*, in: Jens von Scherpenberg, Peter Schmidt (eds.), *Stabilität und Kooperation: Aufgaben internationaler Ordnungspolitik*, Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, pp. 234-255.

¹³ Keohane, Robert O./Joseph S. Nye/ Stanley Hoffmann (eds.). 1993. *After the Cold War. International Institutions and State Strategies in Europe, 1989-1991*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

contrepoids [...] La France, qui est l'héritière d'une histoire prestigieuse, est potentiellement menacée par cette évolution du monde."¹⁴ By alluding to the concept of *hyperpuissance*, Védérine also employed a political-tactical means of trying to mobilize other European states to France's own interests. Despite these changes to the international environment, France did not alter its preference for the creation of a multipolar order and spreading of its particular kind of universalism. It did, however, tailor its strategy for achieving this to the exigencies of the new environment.

In order to reach the goal of a multipolar world in which France is more independent from American influence, French policy-makers have had to acknowledge openly that the country needs the support of its allies in most military contingencies. For medium-sized states such as France, international cooperation in today's world is more necessary than ever. This is because the kind of free-riding on a superpower's efforts to provide security that was possible in the bipolar world of the Cold War with a US security guarantee, is made less feasible in a world where security is less than a global public good. Yet France is still faced with the dilemma – cooperation in what political and military forum?

At the beginning of the 1990s, the basic rules of military cooperation within the Atlantic Alliance began to change. NATO underwent a process of reform in which it allowed for a mechanism through which the EU would indirectly have access to NATO assets and capabilities (so-called "Berlin Plus" Agreement in which the WEU can call upon the Combined Joint Task Force mechanism; see Kupferschmidt and Pentland in this volume), and also stretched its mandate so as to be able to deploy its forces out-of-area.¹⁵ President Chirac understood that France had to develop its cooperation with NATO if Paris was to avoid political isolation in the debate over European security. On December 5 1995, it was announced that France would resume its participation in NATO's Military Committee and that the French defence minister would henceforth participate in alliance discussions.¹⁶ This was more than a mere continuation of France's slow reconciliation with the Alliance: for the first time France was bringing official discourse on, and *de facto* activity in, the Alliance more into accord with each other. Nonetheless, this does not mean that France agrees with other member-states' intentions to increase NATO's geographical and political reach.

France also adjusted its own military in response to the changing security environment. On February 22 1996, President Chirac announced on television a radical reform program for the French armed forces. The French armed forces were transformed so as to be able to perform four different missions – dissuasion, prevention, projection and protection. None of these functions are entirely new, but their order of priorities has changed: the accent of the 1996 reforms is clearly on prevention, and especially, on projection.¹⁷ French decision-makers have drawn radical conclusions about the new strategic context in Europe and abroad. France is seeking to specialize in the two military missions that are most likely to be the dominant mode of engagement in the years to come: crisis prevention and crisis intervention. A significantly increased capacity for crisis intervention is the main rationale behind the gradual professionalization of the French armed forces. France now needs a smaller, but highly

¹⁴ "Today's world is characterized by an American predominance that sometimes is described as hegemony [...]. The difference to the world before is that there is no longer a counterweight [...]. France, who is hereditary to a prestigious history is potentially threatened by this evolution of the world." Audition du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Hubert Védérine, devant la Commission des Affaires Etrangères de l'Assemblée Nationale, Paris, 26. Juin 1997, in: *Politique Etrangère de la France, Mai-Juni 1997*, p. 219.

¹⁵ Yost, David S. 1998. *NATO transformed. The Alliance's New Roles in International Security*. Washington D.C.: United States Institute for Peace Press.

¹⁶ Charles G. Cogan. 2001. *The Third Option. The Emancipation of European Defense, 1989-2000*. Praeger: Westport, Connecticut; London, pp. 83-86.

¹⁷ The 1994 White Book took an ambiguous stance on the problem. On the one hand, it analyzed the strategic environment in a similar if not identical fashion, yet it stuck to military missions that were still centered on the defense of the national territory.

professional force in order to be able to intervene effectively in limited crises – together with the help of other states.¹⁸

In practical terms, France's participation in military operations under the aegis of NATO made it increasingly irrational not to be present in the main military bodies of the Alliance, especially the Military Committee (MC). The newly elected President Chirac developed a candid view of France's participation in the Atlantic Alliance: "if France wants to play a determining role in the creation of a European defence entity, it must take into account the state of mind of its partners, and reconsider to a large degree the form of its relations with NATO ... The necessary rebalancing of relations within the Atlantic Alliance ... can only be taken from the inside, not against the US, but in accord with it."¹⁹ While this reasoning justified a closer relationship with NATO – one has only to think of France's participation in the Kosovo war or in the NATO Response Force (see Kupferschmidt's contribution in this volume) – it does not hide France's real intentions. These are: the creation of an autonomous Europe as regards security and defence policy, and achieving France's as well as Europe's status of strategic actor "with boots". In addition to France's rapprochement with NATO, the EU announced initially under the Franco-German leadership and later under Franco-British leadership, the intention to create its own crisis management institution.

One major milestone in this respect was the Franco-British summit in Saint Malo in December 1998. This summit launched the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) to be drawn up via intergovernmentalist decision-making structures. According to Chirac, the purpose of ESDP is to facilitate the creation of a multipolar world. This "multipolar world France is seeking will provide balance and harmony. But it will not be feasible unless Europe is organised and able to play its role on the international stage."²⁰ Hence, France will not function alone as a counterweight to the US as it understood its role during the Cold War: Europe should provide this balance nowadays. The strategy to pursue a multipolar world has been refocused. For Europe to become credible, it "means acquiring the military capabilities to be able to decide and act without relying on choices made elsewhere."²¹ However, the resistance of some European partners – especially the British and Dutch - to conceive of ESDP as a countervailing force to the US and as an alternative to NATO's security policy component as well as their reluctance to raise their defence budget, forces Paris to agree to further compromises. To mention just one such example, one only has to look at the creation and relationship of the Euro-Corps with NATO. The Euro-Corps was officially inaugurated at the Franco-German summit at La Rochelle May 21-22 1992 (with a projected size of 50,000 persons). "In January 1993, France made a major concession, at the insistence of Germany, in agreeing that, should a military crisis arise in Europe, the Euro-Corps would be placed under the command of NATO."²² Furthermore, French compromises and concessions to its strategy are most visible if one compares France's rhetoric with its security and defense policy on the ground. One can observe a disjuncture between the rhetoric which postulates a multipolar world (and hence, at least in parts, Europe as a countervailing force) and the policies which pursue a strategy of multilateralism with the US as one strategic partner.

The degree to which France actually maintains the goal of spreading French universalism and creating a multipolar world despite its strategic compromises and concessions is shown in a recent report that has been published by the *Assemblée Nationale* on the EU-US

¹⁸ Chirac referred explicitly in his television interview of February 22, 1996 to the inadequate number of troops France was able to muster during the Persian Gulf War, while praising several times the British army as a model for national reforms. Chirac set a target of 50,000 men that should be immediately available for crisis prevention and crisis intervention in two different theatres, once the reforms are complete.

¹⁹ Chirac quoted after Grant, Robert P. 1996. "France's New Relationship with NATO." *Survival* 38, 1 (Spring 1996): 63.

²⁰ Chirac. 2000.

²¹ Chirac. 2000.

²² Cogan. 2001, pp. 4-5. The concession is also known as the Lanxade-Naumann-Shalikhshvili agreement.

relationship. The report starts off with the observation that “there is no longer a single framework for action”²³ for the US and Europe – especially France. NATO is understood as an “unidentified strategic instrument”²⁴ and “France is not necessarily keen to dispel the uncertainties that plague the Alliance.”²⁵ However, the Commission headed by former Prime Minister Eduard Balladur is also aware that there is a wide gap between the French rhetoric and French actions. Although France refuses “any decision which might *a priori* restrict the ESDP’s room for maneuver, now and in the future”.²⁶ Balladur also reminds the audience that France is the second largest contributor to NATO forces and the fourth largest financial contributor to the NATO budget. Hence, today France is still with NATO, but more out of necessity than conviction. It will very likely still act within NATO tomorrow. However, the report makes it very clear that France understands the US as being alien to Europe, and the alienation is mainly defined through values. Here, American values are understood as the primacy of the individual, suspicion of any internal intervention by the federal state but visceral attachment to the nation, acceptance of the use of force, messianic ethos of a nation which sees itself as the Promised Land, and a high level of religious practice. Hence, the major condition to keep the transatlantic relationship going in a pragmatic sense is “that the Americans control their power, and the Europeans accept theirs.”²⁷ “The conclusion that emerges from the Commission’s work is quite clear: Europe and the United States are so different that it would be useless to pretend that they share exactly the same vision of the world; they nevertheless share fundamental values and numerous interests, which set them apart from the vast majority of other countries.”²⁸

Conclusion

Over the last decade one can observe three changes: (1) the loss of France's special political position and America's unilateral gain in political and military supremacy, (2) a more complex transatlantic security relationship, and (3) a clear trend toward increased multinational cooperation. All three have required an adaptation of France's security policy, of its overall strategy as well as of its armed forces. However, its preference over outcome stayed the same: the creation and elaboration of a European force countervailing the US. This force would not necessarily contradict the US at every turn, but rather give Europe, and hence France as a major player in Europe, a greater margin of manoeuvre to act independently of its partner across the Atlantic. In line with the argument presented above, France is interested in every platform that furthers its own position in international relations. This might sound like a platitude at first, but let's briefly look at the two other major European players to show that this is not a common position in Europe. Kupferschmidt showed in his chapter that the UK is constrained through its special relationship to the US. Hence, the British formulation of its interest has to take the US's position into account. The Germans, on the other hand, as shown by Haftendorn, increase the capacity to act through the – almost unconditional use – of international institutions. France, on the other hand, while willing to act within the EU, NATO or the UN always sees them as tools that could as easily – if the international system allowed – be substituted by national policies. Therefore, France prioritizes politically cooperative platforms in which it can voice its opinion best, namely intergovernmental structures with few players at hand: the EU3 but also the Security Council in the UN.

²³ Assemblée Nationale. 2005. “Information Report remitted by the Foreign Affairs Committee on the relationship between Europe and the United States.” N. 2567. http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/12/dossiers/europe_relations_etats-unis_english.asp, p. 12.

²⁴ Assemblée Nationale. 2005. p.21.

²⁵ Assemblée Nationale. 2005. p.22.

²⁶ Assemblée Nationale. 2005. p.22.

²⁷ Assemblée Nationale. 2005. p.35.

²⁸ Assemblée Nationale. 2005. p.36.

The speech given by M. de Villepin before the Security Council was not incidental but rather an expression of France's view of the transatlantic security relationship of the future. France is keen on creating a countervailing force inside the transatlantic relationship to reduce its dependency on the US. To achieve this goal, France has to commit to the ESDP project – but in its intergovernmental structure. In the case of Iraq, France underestimated its European partners' solidarity with the US. If, however, there are no clear signals emanating from either side of the Atlantic to renew the relationship, then France's conception of the relationship could become the European view. "It will happen in starts and stops, but I am convinced that it is necessary and inevitable."²⁹

²⁹ Chirac. 2000.